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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUCHAREST 000245

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DEPT FOR EUR/NCE: AARON JENSEN

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TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [DRL](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [RO](#)
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE DELIVERED ON RELIGION LAW

REF: SECSTATE 15489

Classified By: Political Counselor Ted Tanoue for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Human Rights Officer delivered reftel demarche 2/15 to MFA Director for OSCE, COE, and Human Rights Issues, Brandusa Predescu. Predescu took the points on board with little comment, evincing the hope that the USG would not tie its reaction to the new religion law to the OSCE and other issues. She also requested that we give Romanian authorities a chance to implement the new law before passing judgment. During a follow-up meeting 2/22 with State Secretary for Religious Affairs Adrian Lemeni, Lemeni argued that the new law was an improvement on an outdated communist-era law dating back to 1948. He also argued that the law does not restrict religious freedom in any way, and noted that more restrictive laws were in effect in Austria, Slovakia, and other EU countries. Lemeni remarked that the new law offers a "generous framework" to all religious groups, with some new provisions that were to the detriment of the majority Orthodox Church (Note: He cited a provision allowing non-orthodox believers to be buried in the same cemetery as orthodox individuals as an example.) In closing, Lemeni echoed Predescu in requesting that the international community allow authorities a chance to implement the new law before weighing in with reactions. He also welcomed any future discussion on this issue.

¶2. (C) DCM also made demarche points 2/9 to Presidential Political Advisor Teodor Baconschi. Baconschi's response tracked closely with the points raised subsequently by MFA interlocutors. DCM observed that Baconschi, who is a noted Romanian theologian and diplomat, was "cherry-picking" from selected religion laws elsewhere in Europe to assert that the Romanian law overall was consistent with European practice. In fact, DCM asserted, the new Romanian law on religion had attracted the negative attention of international experts, including on the Helsinki Commission, because in its totality it was overly restrictive on a number of key points. Baconschi insisted that the new Romanian law, while "not perfect," was a substantial improvement over its predecessor. He also stressed that the Romanian government, in its implementation of the law, would be "very moderate" and would remain sensitive to U.S. concerns.
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